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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR APPEARS WITH YASENI AT PRESS EVENT

REF: KABUL 1590

11. (U) The Ambassador on June 22 continued his public engagement with leading opposition presidential candidates, appearing with Lower House Deputy Speaker Mirwais Yaseni in front of Afghan and international media. The Ambassador reiterated US impartiality and commitment to credible, secure, and inclusive elections as he did in earlier appearances with Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah (reftel).

The appearance received similar coverage as the two prior events. We have forwarded copies of the Ambassador's remarks from all three events to SRAP.

12. (SBU) At the June 22 weekly Cabinet meeting, President Karzai and his advisors reportedly discussed their objections to the Ambassador appearing with presidential candidates. Karzai instructed Foreign Minister Spanta to send a letter to the Embassy outlining the government's concerns. Spanta's senior advisor Marodian told us today that Spanta is resisting sending a letter. If/when Embassy receives the letter, we will forward a copy to Washington. Word of the Cabinet discussion has leaked to the media, which contacted public affairs officers for a reaction. Embassy officials have told journalists, as well as FM Spanta directly, that the Ambassador appeared at the media events on the candidates' invitations and only used the opportunities to restate the US commitment to a credible, secure, and inclusive election, and to encourage all candidates to engage in a rigorous debate on the most important issues facing the country.

13. (SBU) During a private meeting before the press conference, Yaseni told the Ambassador he had built a campaign team of "clean personalities" devoid of military leaders like those who had endorsed Karzai's reelection. "We want to marginalize the warlords," he said. Yaseni appreciated the US statements on its neutrality in the elections, but requested that such public statements be repeated at least every two weeks to reinforce the perception among the Afghan population. Yaseni accused several government officials and MPs of improperly using government resources to aid Karzai's campaign. He also accused Abdullah of receiving funds from Iran, claiming that during a recent visit to Iran, Iranian officials had pressured Yaseni's 2nd VP running mate to withdraw from the race and support Abdullah. The Ambassador urged Yaseni to report suspected violations of election law to the Electoral Complaints Commission.

14. (U) During the press conference, Yaseni echoed themes similar to those raised by Ghani and Abdullah at their events. He challenged Karzai to an open debate and criticized the government's performance on anti-corruption and governance over the past several years. His campaign will focus on winning over young voters, women, and civil society activists. In addition to his two fellow parliamentarian running mates, two other MPs attended the press conference.

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